DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 271 911 EC 190 219

AUTHOR Reschly, Daniel J.
TITLE Myths and Realities in Minority Special Education Overrepresentation.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 30p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association (93rd, Los Angeles, CA, August 23-27, 1985).
AVAILABLE FROM Daniel J. Reschly, Department of Psychology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classification; Educational Trends; Elementary Secondary Education; Intelligence Quotient; *Mild Mental Retardation; *Minority Groups; *Social Bias; Special Education; *Student Placement; *Test Bias; *Trend Analysis

ABSTRACT

Claims of overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs and the myths and distortions surrounding these claims are the topic of this study. The findings of a report on this topic performed by the National Academy of Sciences is discussed, noting that although the report focused on the right question (why is overrepresentation a problem rather than why does it exist?), it did not fully appreciate the complexity of learning problems exhibited by students with mild retardation. Myths concerning overrepresentation are exposed, including that the most important issue in placement bias litigation is IQ test bias; that overrepresentation is objectionable to minority plaintiffs and social scientists; and that minority mildly retarded students as adults disappear into the normal population and are no longer identifiable as retarded. Changes in the category of mild mental retardation over the past 15 years are analyzed, and the need for genuine reforms to produce more effective programs is emphasized. Suggestions for changes in classification systems and in the development of a broader range of regular education options for students with achievement problems are given. A five-page list of references and data tables are appended. (CL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

pm81:Myths/re

ED271911

[1]Myths and Realities in Minority Special Education Overrepresentation

[2]Daniel J. Reschly
Iowa State University

[1] Paper presented as part of the APA Board of Scientific Affairs Symposium "Placement of Children in Special Education: Scientific Issues and Policy Trends" American Psychological Association Annual Convention, Los Angeles, August 1985.

[2] Copies of this and related papers can be obtained by contacting the author at the Department of Psychology, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.

EC190219

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
D. J. Reschly
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Myths and Realities in Minority Special Education Overrepresentation

Daniel J. Reschly

Iowa State University

One of the most controversial issues in school psychology and related areas is the overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs, particularly in special class programs for the mildly retarded. The overrepresentation problem, if it is a problem, is highly complex, with numerous underlying assumptions and implicit issues. Overrepresentation is often misunderstood and sometimes distorted. A number of myths concerning overrepresentation minorities will be discussed in a later section.

One of the most important efforts to analyze minority overrepresentation appeared as a National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Panel Report in 1982 (Heller, Holtzman, & Messick). A symposium featuring reviews of that report appeared on the American Educational Research Association convention program in Montreal in 1983. Those critiques were later published as articles in the Educational Researcher. In this paper I intend to briefly summarize my earlier critique of the NAS panel report (Reschly, 1984), but interested readers are encouraged to contact me for a reprint of that review. I might add in passing, the demand for reprints of that and other articles I have written has not been overwhelming. I would be happy to supply a copy, in fact, I would be flattered if you asked. A brief review of that earlier critique follows.

The Right Question

The major breakthrough represented in the NAS panel report was recognition of the right question with respect to minority overrepresentation in special education. Unlike previous critiques in the courts and elsewhere, the NAS panel focused on the question of, Why is overrepresentation viewed as a problem?, rather than the question of, Why does it occur? The question of why is it a problem is particularly salient when one remembers that special classes for the mildly retarded involve substantially greater expenditures per pupil than regular education. These programs provide a lower pupil to teacher ratio, greater individualization, and an annual review of the individualized program. These characteristics are normally seen as highly desirable. However, these normally desirable characteristics were not sufficient in the views of plaintiffs representing minority students in numerous Federal District Court cases over the past 15 years (Bersoff, 1982; Prasse & Reschly, in press; Reschly, in press). Perhaps it would be useful to slightly rephrase the NAS panel report question to, Why were these substantial additional resources insufficient to satisfy the demands of minority plaintiffs in the placement bias litigation?

In posing the right question, Why is overrepresentation a problem?, the NAS panel quickly focused on the key criterion for analysis of past, current, and future special education programs. That crucial criterion is instructional validity or what was referred to in an earlier paper as an outcomes criterion (Reschly, 1979). Others have also focused on the issue of outcomes and the appropriateness of special education programming (e.g., Lambert, 1981). The specific question that should be asked is, Do special education programs for the mildly retarded produce better outcomes for students than other alternatives such as full time regular education placement

without special services or various kinds of special services within regular education?

NAS Panel Reforms

A number of reforms were suggested by the NAS panel which were designed to enhance the instructional validity of special programming for students. These reforms can be generally divided into changes in referral and assessment procedures and revisions in instructional practices.

Prereferral Interventions

One of the reforms suggested by the NAS panel was greater emphasis on interventions within regular education prior to referral for preplacement evaluations. The NAS panel noted that special education was often seen as the only option for students who were achieving at low levels in regular classrooms. The panel noted quite rightly that a variety of regular education remedial options should exist, and that these options should be used prior to consideration of special eduation placement. The panel also noted that the availability of regular education options apparently influences the numbers of minority students placed in special education, a trend that seems particularly prominent in the analyses of data concerning Hispanic students.

The NAS panel report provides considerable further impetus for an increasingly strong reform trend in special education. Prereferral interventions are probably the most important trend in special education today. A number of programs are currently being developed and evaluated concerning prereferral interventions. The panel quite rightly saw these interventions and options as a central to appropriate programming for minority students, and I would add, for majority students as well.

Learning Process Assessment

A second reform advocated by the panel was greater use of learning process assessment procedures such as those developed by Feuerstein, Rand, and

Hoffman (1979). Although these procedures are promising, the exact relationship of Feuerstein's procedures to educational programming is unclear, and the procedure leads to something quite different than direct instruction in basic skills, an approach strongly advocated by the NAS panel. The NAS panel's enthusiasm for learning process assessment is probaly premature in view of the rather sparse data on implementation and outcome evaluation.

Assessment of Biomedical Factors

The NAS panel also emphasized the importance of greater use of biomedical data. The emphasis on this area is somewhat difficult to understand in view of the panel's strong emphasis on instructional utility. Perhaps further clarification is needed concerning the use of these biomedical data. There is no doubt that general screening for sensory problems and other health or developmental difficulties is important. However, the usefulness of devices classified by Messick as biomedical, e.g., the physical dexterity tasks from the System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment and the Bender-Gestalt, are not closely related to educational programming. Furthermore, these devices often are misused in naive, sometimes primitive, inferences about neurological integrity, which are, again, quite unrelated to educational programming.

Emphasis on Adaptive Behavior

The emphasis on adaptive behavior in classification of students as mildly retarded and as a basis for educational programming was quite sound. However, the crucial, and unappreciated, issue is conception of adaptive behavior. Different conceptions of adaptive behavior place quite different emphases on the importance of underlying cognitive competencies, communication skills, and academic performance. A number of adaptive behavior measures have been published recently or improved substantially in recent years. Depending on conception of adaptive behavior, and then on how adaptive behavior is assessed, students currently classified as mildly retarded may continue to be so classified or the current population of the mildly retarded might be

completely eliminated because they do not exhibit adaptive behavior deficits according to certain conceptions. Conception of adaptive behavior is a crucial issue in mild mental retardation. Greater attention needs to be devoted to conception of adaptive behavior and to the use of a wide variety of adaptive behavior information, including the results of standardized inventories, in classification and educational programming decisions (Reschly, 1985).

Instruction, Not Setting

The NAS panel saw the traditional emphasis on setting in which instruction is delivered, particularly part-time resource programs vs. self-contained special classes, as less important than the kind of instruction that is provided to students. The panel quite rightly saw the problem of setting as enormously complex and regarded the available data as inadequate to determine the relative effectiveness of self-contained special classes, part-time resource teaching programs, or regular education as methods for delivering educational services to mildly retarded students. The panel saw the kind of instruction as more important. They also noted that direct instruction seems to work with the mildly retarded and that direct instruction can be delivered in a variety of settings including special classes, resource teaching programs, and regular classrooms.

Although the panel's emphasis on direct instruction is quite sound, their appreciation of the complexity of the setting variable, particularly at the middle and upper grade levels, was probably insufficient. Mainstreaming, or providing educational services to mildly retarded students within regular education programs, is probably more difficult at the middle and upper grade levels for a variety of reasons. Further research on this problem is clearly needed and additional efforts to implement promising mainstreaming programs at higher grade levels with the mildly retarded are needed (e.g., Wang & Birch,

1984).

Curriculum Decisions

The panel spent relatively little time in analyzing the content of the curriculum for students classified as mildly retarded. These curriculum decisions become increasingly complex at higher grade levels. Increasingly, there is not time to do everything that is desirable, certainly a problem in all educational settings, but probably far more intense with students classified as mildly retarded due to the nature of their learning problems (Campione, Brown, & Ferrara, 1982). At the upper grade levels increasingly difficult decisions need to be made about the relative emphasis on basic academic skills, functional academic knowledge, social competencies, and work experiences.

Summary

Overall, the NAS panel report was excellent due to their emphasis on the following matters: 1) the panel asked the right questions (finally), particularly Why is overrepresentation a problem rather than Why does it exist. 2) The emphasis of the panel on direct instruction, particularly that direct instruction does work with students classified as mildly retarded, was quite useful. 3) The panel's decision that setting as such was less important than kind of instruction provided was also quite useful. The major problem with the panel report was that they probably did not appreciate fully the complexity of learning problems exhibited by students classified as mildly retarded and they seem to be unduly enthusiastic about the usefulness of a number of recent, but untested, innovations, some of which have little or no direct relationship to instructional decisions.

Myths and Realities

There are a number of myths concerning overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs. These myths have often become the central issues in discussions of overrepresentation. Recognition of these

myths and focusing attention on the reality of low achievement among economically disadvantaged students is essential to progress in this area.

Myth 1: The most important issue in placement bias litigation was IQ test bias.

Placement bias litigation alleging discrimination due to overrepresentation of minority students in special education programs for the mildly retarded has exerted a profound influence on special education and the practice of school psychology (Bersoff, 1982; Prasse & Reschly, in press; Reschly, in press). Although the cases vary significantly on a number of dimensions, particularly cases settled by consent decrees prior to 1975 vs. those cases settled by judicial opinions since 1975, the central issue in the most famous of these cases, Larry P. V. Riles, (1979) appeared to be IQ test bias. At least, this was the central issue emphasized in the judicial opinion and in various commentaries on this case.

The fact that much more than IQ test bias was involved in Larry P and in much of the rest of the placement bias litigation is apparent from three conclusions reached by Judge Peckham in the Larry P. Opinion. These three conclusions were: 1) IQ tests are biased. 2) IQ tests and achievement tests autocorrelate, i.e., they are the same. and 3); "The customary uses of achievement tests are not questionned by plaintiffs." This rather strange reasoning as well as a careful analysis of the Opinion indicates that a number of underlying assumptions and implicit issues were probably more important to Larry P. than the issue of IQ test bias. Analysis of these underlying assumptions and implicit issues is beyond the scope of this paper, but further information is available in Reschly (1980). A particularly good treatment of Larry P., particularly the motives of the plaintiffs and the defendants, is available in Elliott (In press). However, although IQ tests bias was the ostensible issue in the litigation, many other issues were more important, particularly the assumptions about the ineffectiveness of special

education programming.

Myth 2: Overrepresentation in educational programs is objectionable to minority plaintiffs and social scientists.

A simplistic view of the placement bias litigation and criticisms of minority social scientists would be to conclude that overrepresentation is the problem. This view would suggest that the primary problem is that minority students are overrepresented, that, and that alone. This assertion is exposed as a myth when one considers the substantial overrepresentation of minority students in a number of other education programs such as Head Start, Follow Through, and Chapter I. The overrepresentation of these programs is just as great, and perhaps greater, than the overrepresentation in special education programs. However, there has never been class action litigation filed against districts and state departments for overrepresentation in these other programs, nor has this overrepresentation been criticized severely by minority social scientists. Why? If overrepresentation per se is the major problem.

Overrepresentation in special education is not acceptable while other kinds of overrepresentation clearly is acceptable. The reason for the differing views on the overrepresentation probably relates to the greater stigma associated with special education, the underlying issue in the court cases concerning assertions of hereditary differences in intellectual potential, and the implicit assumption of ineffective programming in special education. The point is, though, overrepresentation as such is not the problem, rather the nature and qualities of the programs in which the overrepresentation occurs.

Myth 3: Large numbers and substantial proportions of minority students are labeled as retarded and placed in special education.

Comparisons of percentages of persons in various kinds of programs can be very misleading, particularly if the overall percent in one of the programs is

very low. Placement data reflecting overrepresentation of minority students often are distorted. In fact, the numbers and proportions of minority students classified as handicapped and placed in special education programs is relatively small. Careful distinctions must be made between: 1) The percent of the EMR special education enrollment by group vs. 2) The percent of each group in various special education programs. Several tables at the end of this paper provide illustrations of these considerations. In Table 1 overrepresentation data for the entire state of California for two school years are presented. Throughout this period, black students constituted about 10 percent of the total school population, but about 25 percent of the EMR enrollment. However, in 1968-69, just over 3 percent of all black students were placed in EMR classes. By the time of the Larry P. court proceeding, black students still constituted about 10 percent of the total population and 25 percent of the EMR enrollment, but only 1 percent of all black students were in special classes for the mildly retarded. Thus, the Larry P. decision banning use of IQ tests with black students, <u>if</u> the outcome of assessment is classification of mild mental retardation, affects a very small percentage of the black student population. Further illustrations of these findings are apparent in Table 2 reporting data for Riverside, CA, Table 3 reporting data from the State of New Jersey, Table 4 reporting data from the city of Chicago, and in Table 5 reporting data for the entire United States based on an Office for Civil Rights survey conducted in 1978. In each of these instances, it is important to note that relatively small percentages of minority students are classified as mildly mentally retarded. The relatively small numbers and proportions classified as mildly retarded are not meant to be used to dismiss concerns about overrepresentation. The concerns about overrepresentation are entirely appropriate, but perceptions of the magnitude of the problem and the kind of remedy that might be appropriate need to be based on accurate data.

Myth 4: Minorities are always or nearly always overrepresented in special education.

The actual overrepresentation of minority students across all special education programs is highly variable. There are variations across categories as well as variations from place to place. Careful inspection of the tables reflecting minority special education enrollment indicates considerable variation. Generally, it appears that Hispanic students may be underrepresented in special education, perhaps due to the reforms from the Diana and Guadalupe consent decrees, later incorporated in the PL94-142 Rules and Regulations, as well as the availability of regular education options such as bilingual programs for Hispanic students achieving at low levels. It is also clear that black students are not uniformly overrepresented in special education programs. The clearest trend is disproportionate enrollment of black and white students in special education programs for the mildly retarded and learning disabled. Black students tend to be overrepresented in programs for the mildly retarded and underrepresented in learning disability programs, a pattern of enrollment which has been the subject of some litigation (Marshall vs. Georgia, 1984) as well as criticism from minority special scientists (e.g., Collins & Camblin, 1983). The overrepresentation in mild mental retardation and underrepresentation in LD for black students may not be a simple matter of different terms for similar problems. There is greater stigma attached to the classification of mental retardation and programs for the mildly retarded are more likely to be provided in self-contained classes which often have relatively little involvement with regular education. However, minorities are not always overrepresented in special education: in fact, the actual percent of minority and majority students placed in special education programs is nearly the same. There is disproportionality across categories, but that pattern too, varies considerably from place to place.

Myth 5: IQ bias is the cause of overrepresentation of minority students in programs for the mildly retarded.

As noted earlier, the very complicated issue of IQ test bias was the central concern in the Larry P. (1979, 1984) litigation. Judge Peckham concluded that IQ test bias was the primary cause of overrepresentation, a conclusion he based to a large extent on testimony by Mercer. Mercer (1973, 1979) contended that there was no overrepresentation of minority students in referrals but that overrepresentation occurred after school psychologists administered intelligence tests. This conclusion was based on studies conducted in Riverside, CA in the mid-1960's. Mercer apparently combined referrals for all reasons, including referrals of students for possible giftedness. By combining referrals these very different kinds of referrals, no overrepresentation of minority students was apparent. However, psychological evaluation involving use of IQ tests did yield disproportionate numbers of black and Hispanic students classified as mildly retarded. This allowed Mercer to assert that the use of IQ tests was primarily responsible for the overrepresentation.

Combining all types of referrals including those for possible giftedness with those for learning problems seems inappropriate, despite Mercer's contention that nearly all of the students referred for those reasons were given IQ tests. It is highly unlikely, in fact, no cases were reported, in which a student referred for possible giftedness was classified as mildly retarded after the administration of an IQ test. If referrals are not combined for all reasons, then minority students are disproportionately referred due to learning problems, a result consistent with a variety of sources of information.

The issue here has to do with the effects of IQ tests on minority overrepresentation and the degree to which such tests are biased. In addition to the comprehensive reviews of IQ test bias that have appeared in recent

years (Jensen, 1980, Reynolds, 1982), two further considerations are relevant to this problem. First of all, the percent of students actually classified as mildly retarded has never approached the percent of students who would be eligible according to the IQ criteria established by various states. For example, in California in the 1960's, students with IQ's as high as 79 could be classified as mildly retarded according to state Rules and Regulations. This would suggest that a total of 9% or so of all students would be potentially eligible for the classification as mildly retarded. In fact, far fewer than 9% of students were classified as mildly retarded. That general trend holds true, it appears, in all cases. The percent of students classified as mildly retarded is always far less than the percent of students eligible according to the IQ criteria. Something other than IQ must be determinative.

A second consideration relevant to the effects of IQ test bias on overrepresentation has to do with the results of using purportedly a less biased IQ measure. The System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment Estimated Learning Potential measure, intended to at least reduce if not eliminate the alleged biases in conventional IQ tests, has relatively little effect on proportions of minority or majority students classified as mildly retarded (Reschly, 1981; Talley, 1979).

The fact is that referral due to serious achievement problems is a far more important cause of overrepresentation than IQ tests. I might note here that I fully expect that IQ will be used less in the future for special education classification, not because of biases and tests, but rather because IQ test results will be less related to the classification criteria that are likely to be used in the future.

Myth 6: Minority students place in special education programs for the mildly retarded are not really retarded.

One of Judge Peckham's major conclusions on Larry P. was that the

plaintiff's in the class action suit were not really retarded. An obvious question here is, What are the criteria for real or genuine mild mental retardation? Although these criteria vary considerably from state to state (Patrick & Reschly, 1982) and reflect a variety of systems factors (MacMillan, Meyers, & Morrison, 1980), there are certain general criteria that are widely agreed upon and used as the basis for classifying students as mildly mentally retarded. The most authoritative single source for mental retardation classification criteria is the American Association on Mental Deficiency (AAMD) classification system (Grossman, 1983). The AAMD classification system is, arguably, the most authoritative source of information on what constitutes "real" mental retardation.

The AAMD criteria requires significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning that exists concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior. A full treatment of this topic would require that much more be said concerning how each of those dimensions is assessed in practical situations, but the critical features, significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning and deficits in adaptive behavior, are the fundamental basis for mental retardation. It is important to note that mental retardation, according to the AAMD scheme, refers only to current status. The AAMD scheme does <u>not</u> require permanence nor biological etiology. Moreover, the AAMD scheme merely specifies "deficits in adaptive behavior", not comprehensive incompetence in most or all social roles and settings.

Some commentatories, while claiming to use the AAMD classification system, are, in fact, requiring comprehensive incompetence, permanence, and biological etiology for what they regard as "real" mental retardation (e.g., Mercer, 1973, page 221). In contrast to the views of Judge Peckham and a number of other critics, many of whom who do not seem to be familiar with the AAMD classification system, the minority students placed in special education

programs for the mildly retarded did meet state department of education criteria for mild mental retardation. They did exhibit deficits in adaptive behavior, significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, and, most important, very low academic performance. Now, whether or not those characteristics should lead to a diagnosis of mild mental retardation is another question addressed in the last section of this paper under the topic of classification system reform.

Myth 7: Mildly retarded students as adults, particularly minority mildly retarded students, disappear into the normal population and are no longer identifiable as mentally retarded.

One of the most widespread myths concerning the mildly retarded ,minority and majority, is that these persons disappear into the normal population as adults and are no longer regarded as mildly retarded. It is certainly true that the vast majority of mildly retarded students are no longer classified officially as handicapped by any agency during the adult years. This finding has appeared in longitudinal studies conducted over the last 50 years. However, the adult adjustment of students classified as mildly retarded does reflect some significant problems which, to a significant degree, are based on the same kinds of deficits that led originally to referral, evaluation, classification, and placement during the school age years. These problems deal, fundamentally, with abstract thought, conceptions of time and number, and the literacy skills required for everyday functioning. Recent studies by Edgerton and his colleagues (Edgerton, 1984) suggest that students classified as mildly retarded, including minority students, are identified as considerably less able by others in their families and neighborhoods, at least during the early adult years. This finding is based on the very thorough methodology, called the participant-observer method, pioneered by Edgerton and colleagues as a method to study mental retardation. The participant-observer method involves a far more through study of the lives of mildly retarded persons than the conventional used psychological or sociological methods.

Persons interested in this literature and concerned about the adjustment patterns of mildly retarded students as adults are strongly encouraged to look at Edgerton's recent work which would appear to have significant implications for educational programming. The important point with respect to this paper is that students classified as mildly retarded do not, somehow, magically disappear into the regular population. Although they are no longer classified officially, the same kinds of deficits that caused problems in school also cause problems during the adult years.

Myth 8: Minorities are overrepresented in special education programs for the mildly retarded due to discrimination in the assessment and decision making process.

A final myth is that minority students are discriminated against in other aspects of the assessment process, i.e., in assessment processes and procedures beyond the selection, administration, and interpretation of intelligence tests, and in the overall decision making process. Most of the data available in this realm involves simulation studies which have yielded inconsistent results (Huebner & Cummings, 1985; Ysseldyke, Algozzine, Regan, & McGue, 1981). Studies of populations of minority and white students classified as mildly retarded indicate that the same criteria are applied with essentially the same assessment procedures yielding essentially the same classification and placement decisions regardless of race or ethnicity of students. Findings supporting this conclusion were reported for the California decertification experience in which of thousands of students, white, black, and Hispanic, were declassified in the early 1970's (Meyers, MacMillan, & Yoshida, 1978; Yoshida, MacMillan, & Meyers, 1976). Similar results are soon to be published by Reschly and Kicklighter (1985) for samples of white and black students classified as mildly mentally retarded in the defendant school districts in Marshall vs. Georgia (1984).

Summary

A number of assertions, believed to be wide spread beliefs of persons who comment on overrepresentation of minority in special education programs, were regarded as myths in this section of the paper. Minority overrepresentation in programs for the mildly retarded is not a simple phenomena, does not always occur, and is not accounted for by relatively simple explanations such as IQ test bias for discrimination in assessment decision making. Constructive policy changes deal with the perceived problem of minority overrepresentation need to take into account these myths. Another important factor which must be considered, the enormous changes in the population of students classified as mildly retarded, also needs to be considered in developing social policy changes.

Changes in Mild Mental Retardation 1970-1985

Enormous changes have taken place over the past 15 years in the population of students classified as mildly mentally retarded. This time period has seen three revisions of the AAMD classification system (Grossman, 1973, 1977, 1983) which have in turn yielded first, significantly more stringent classification criteria, then no change in the classification criteria, and now recently, in 1983, somewhat less stringent classification criteria. The changes in the classification criteria, particularly the trend toward more stringent criteria during the 1970's has led to a significant decline in the numbers of students classified as mildly retarded in the public schools. Data reflecting this change are presented in Table 6 where it is apparent that an enormous decline in mild mental retardation has occurred while, at the same time, the numbers of students classified as learning disabled has burgeoned. The changes in populations of students classified as mildly retarded probably means that the mildly retarded of 1985 are probably significantly less able than the mildly retarded of 1970 (MacMillan &

Borthwick, 1980; Polloway & Smith, 1983). Discussions of the characteristics and needs of students classified as mildly retarded need to take into account the changes in this population over the last 15 years. Much of what may have been true about the mildly retarded, minority and majority, in the early 1970's, may no longer be true of the mildly retarded in 1985. If the mildly retarded are considerably less able than their counterparts 15 years ago, considerable caution needs to be exercised in the development of alternative programs based on earlier findings.

Genuine Reforms

Genuine reforms which improve outcomes for individual students need to be based on an accurate analysis of the problem and clear recognition of the needs of students who have been or who now are classified as mildly mentally retarded. The first essential fact that must be recognized and dealt with is significantly low achievement by students who are classified as mildly mentally retarded. This pattern of chronic, low achievement is virtually identical for minority and majority students classified as mildly retarded. Genuine reforms must address the problem of chronic low achievement in order to produce outcomes beneficial for students. There is a great deal that can be done to improve those outcomes for students, and much of what needs to be done requires significant changes in the current special education classification and programming practices. These changes are needed in order to produce more effective outcomes, not merely or simply to eliminate disproportionate patterns of classification and placement. The real issue is more effective programs, not simply what kinds of students are placed in what kinds of programs.

Classification System Change: Reform or Revolution

The changes in the exceptional classification system which has dominated special education in this century may be truly dramatic in the foreseeable future. A number of influences, not the least of which is the concern about

placement bias, are combining to produce greater support for classification system changes than at any time over the last 15 or 20 years. Certainly, the impetus for significant reform is far greater than at any time since the enactment and implementation of Public Law 94-142.

The nature of the classification system changes is difficult to anticipate for a variety of reasons. First, there is widespread dissatisfaction with the present system. That widespread dissatisfaction does not necessarily, however, lead to a consensus or even a workable majority concerning the kinds of reforms that are needed. The reforms that we are likely to see in the current classification system in the foreseeable future may range from relatively minor revisions of the current system to a near revolution in which children would no longer be classified but, instead, kinds of services might form the basis for special education programming.

One reform, of considerable benefit to students now classified as mildly retarded, would be either cross categorical or noncategorical services for the mildly handicapped. The cross categorical approach would involve a general mildly handicapping category, which would include nearly all of the students now classified as mildly mentally retarded, learning disabled (LD), or emotionally disturbed (ED). Since there is less stigmas associated with both LD and ED than with mild mental retardation, this reform toward cross-categorical classification would stand to benefit the mildly retarded. Furthermore, the cross-categorical reform might ensure that less restrictive placements such as resource teaching programs become more widely available to mildly retarded students.

Another reform concerning the mildly handicapped would be noncategorical programming. Here, no child based classification would be used, but rather, the kinds of services needed by students would be the basis for the special education program. This kind of reform might also lead to a far closer

relationship, perhaps even merger, between the compensatory-remedial programs now in regular education and special education programs for the mildly handicapped (Leinhardt, Bickel, & Pallay, 1982; Reynolds & Wang, 1983; Wang & Reynolds, 1985). The trend toward noncategorical programming is particularly interesting and promising. It remains to be seen, however, whether these programs work with the kind of students now classified as mildly retarded, especially at the upper grade levels where the differences between regular and mildly retarded students become increasing pronounced.

One kind of reform about which we will hear a great deal more is change in the classification system. There are a wide variety of changes that might occur, ranging from reforms of current practices to virtual revolutions in how special education services are organized and delivered to students. It is important to note that these reforms will not overcome all of the current difficulties with special education. New terminology will undoubtedly acquire negative connotations. Labeling effects will continue to exist, but perhaps to a lesser degree. Moreover, it is highly likely that economically disadvantaged students will be overrepresented in these special programs. Whether or not that overrepresentation leads to a new round of placement bias litigation will depend in large part on the outcomes of those programs, not on the procedures used to classify students or overrepresentation per se.

Regular Education Options

A genuine reform parallel to the classification system changes noted above is the development of a much broader range of regular education options for students who have achievement problems. An unintended, negative effect of PL94-142 has been the reduction or elimination of remedial options in regular education. Regular education options involving using a variety of techniques and administrative structures for delivering services to students who need help, but who are not "really" handicapped need to be developed, implemented, and evaluated. It is important to note that the impetus for the far greater

emphasis on regular education options has come from widespread dissatisfaction with special education for the mildly handicapped (e.g., Ysseldyke, Thurlow, Graden, Wesson, Algozzine, & Deno, 1983) rather than definitive evidence proving the superiority of regular education options over special education for the mildly handicapped. It is important to note that dissatisfaction with one kind of program does not automatically constitute a data based rationale for an alternative. The regular education options need to be implemented carefully and evaluated thoroughly.

In concluding this paper it is perhaps worthwhile to again return to the concept of an outcomes criteria emphasized in earlier work (Reschly, 1979) and, in an alternative form, strongly emphasized by the NAS panel. The outcomes criterion, or what the NAS panel referred to as instructional validity, is the crucial issue. Traditional special education programming must be regarded as unproven with respect to the criteria of outcomes or instructional validity. Although high school work study programs appear to be effective, other kinds of special education programming for the mildly retarded are unproven. Reforms which will be in the best interest of students will address the critical problems which led to referral, i.e., chronic low achievement. Reforms which address these problems are promising. Reforms which merely address overrepresentation, which are often based on myths, are of dubious merit.

pm82:Myth/ref
References for Reschly (1985) APA
paper, "Myths and Realities in Minority
Special Education Overrepresentation

References

Bersoff, D. N. (1982). The legal regulation of schoool psychology. In C. R. Reynolds & T. B. Gutkin (Eds.) The Handbook of School Psychology. New York: John Wiley.

Campione, J. C., Brown, A. L., & Ferrara, R. A. (1982). Mental retardation and intelligence. In R. J. Sternberg (Ed.) Handbook of Human Intelligence Cambridge (England): Cambridge University Press.

Caught in the Web: Misplaced children in Chicago's classes for the mentally retarded. (1982). Chicago, IL: Designs for Change (220 South State Street, Suite 1616, Chicago, IL 60604.

Collins, R. & Camblin, L. D. (1983). The politics and science of learning disability classification. Contemporary Education, 54, 113-118.

Edgerton, R. B. (Ed.) (1984). Lives in process: Mentally retarded adults in a large city. Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Deficiency.

Elliott, R. (1985). The banning of IQ tests in California unpublished manuscript, Dartmouth College.

Feurstein, R., Rand, Y., & Hoffman, M. (1979). The dynamic assessment of retarded performers: The Learning Potential Assessment Device, Theory, Instruments, and Techniques. Baltimore: University Park Press.

Finn, J. D. (1982). Patterns in special education placement as revealed by the OCR surveys. In K. A. Heller, W. Holtzman, & S. Messick (1982) Placing children in special education: A study for equity. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Grossman, H. J. (Ed.) (1973). Manual on terminology and classification in mental retardation. Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Deficiency.

Grossman, H. J. (Ed.) (1977). Manual on terminology and classification in mental retardation. Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Deficiency.

Grossman, H. J. (Ed.) (1983). Classification in mental retardation. Washington, D.C.: American Association on Mental Deficiency.

Heller, K., Holtzman, W. & Messick, S. (Eds.) (1982). Placing Children in Special Education: A Strategy for Equity. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.

Huebner, E. S. & Cummings, J. A. (1985). The impact of sociocultural background and assessment data upon school psychologists' decisions. Journal of School Psychology, 23, 157-166.

Jensen, A. R. (1980). Bias in mental testing. New York: The Free Press.

Lambert, N. M. (1981). Psychological evidence in Larry P. vs. Wilson Riles: An evaluation by a witness for the defense. American Psychologist, 36, 937-952.

Larry P. vs. Riles 495 F. Supp. 926 (N. D. Cal 1979) (decision on merits).

Larry P. vs. Riles. United States Court of Appeals, Ninth Circuit, No. 80-427. January 23, 1984. Trial Court Decision Affirmed.

Leinhardt, G., Bickel, W., & Pallay, A. (1982). Unlabeled but still entitled: Toward more effective remediation. Teachers College Record, 84, 391-422.

MacMillan, D. & Borthwick, S. (1980). The new educable mentally retarded population: Can they be mainstreamed? Mental Retardation, 18, 155-158.

MacMillan, D., Meyers, C. E., & Morrison, G. (1980). System identification of mildly mentally retarded children: Implications for interpreting and conducting research. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 85, 108-115.

Manni, J. L., Winikur, D. W., & Keller, M. (1980). A report on minority group representation in special education programs in the State of New Jersey. New Jersey State Department of Education, 225 W. State Street, Trenton, N.J. 08625. ERIC ED NO. 203575.

Marshall et al. vs. Georgia. U.S. District Court for the Southern District of Georgia, CV482-233, June 28, 1984.

Mercer, J. Labeling the mentally retarded. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1973.

Mercer, J. (1979). System of Multicultural Pluralistic Assessment Technical Manual. New York: Psychological Corporation.

Meyers, C., MacMillan, D. & Yoshida, R. (1978). Validity of psychologists identification of EMR students in the perspective of the California decertification experience. Journal of School Psychology, 16, 3-15.

Patrick, J. & Reschly, D. (1982). Relationship of state educational criteria and demographic variables to school-system prevalence of mental retardation. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 86, 351-360.

Polloway, E. A., & Smith, J. D. (1983). Changes in mild mental retardation: Population, programs, and perspectives. Exceptional Children, 50, 149-159.

Prasse, D., & Reschly, D. (In press). Implications of Larry P. Exceptional Children.

Reschly, D. (1979). Nonbiased assessment. In G. Phye & D. Reschly (Eds.), School psychology: Perspectives and issues. New York: Academic Press.

Reschly, D. (1980). Psychological evidence in the Larry P. Opinion: A case of right problem - wrong solution. School Psychology Review, 9, 123-135.

Reschly, D. (1981). Evaluation of the effects of SOMPA measures on classification of students as mildly mentally retarded. American Journaol of Mental Deficiency, 86, 16-20. (b)

Reschly, D. J. (1984). Beyond IQ test bias: The national academy panel's analysis of minority EMR overrepresentation. Educational Researcher, 13(3), 15-19.

Reschly, D. (1985). Adaptive behavior. In A. Thomas & J. Grimes (Eds.), Best practices in school psychology. Kent, OH: National Association of School Psychologists.

Reschly, D. J., & Kicklighter, R. J. (1985). Comparisons of black and white EMR students from Marshall v. Georgia. Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, Los Angeles, CA.

Reschly, D. (In press). Assessing educational handicaps. In A. Hess & I. Weiner (Eds.), Handbook of Forensic Psychology. New York: Wiley.

Reynolds, C. R. (1982). The problem of bias in psychological assessment. In C. R. Reynolds & T. B. Gutkin (Eds.), The handbook of school psychology. New York: Wiley.

Reynolds, M. C., & Wang, M. (1983). Restructuring "special" school programs: A position paper. Policy Studies Review, 2(Special No. 1), 189-212.

Talley, R. (1979). Evaluating the effects of implementing SOMPA. Bloomington, IN: Center for Innovation in Teaching the Handicapped, University of Indiana.

United States Department of Education (1985). Seventh Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of Public Law 94-142: The Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Washington, DC: Office of Special Education.

Wang, M. C., & Birch, J. W. (1984). Comparison of a full-time mainstreaming program and a resource room approach. Exceptional Children, 51, 33-40.

Wang, M. C., & Reynolds, M. C. (1985). Avoiding the "Catch 22" in special education reform. Exceptional Children, 51, 497-502.

Yoshida, R., MacMillan, B., Meyers, C. (1976). The decertification of minority group EMR students in California: Student achievement and adjustment. In R. Jones (Ed.), Mainstreaming and the Minority Child. Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

Ysseldyke, J., Algozzine, B., Regan, R., & McGue, M. (1981). The influence of test scores and naturally-occurring pupil characteristics on psychoeducational decision-making with children. Journal of School Psychology, 19, 166-177.

Ysseldyke, J. E., Thurlow, M., Graden, J., Wesson, C., Algozzine, B., & Deno, S. (1983). Generalizations from five years of research on assessment and decision making: The University of Minnesota Institute. Exceptional Education Quarterly, 4, 75-93.

Table 1

[1]Overrepresentation Data From California 1968-69 and 1976-77

Group	Percent of Total Population	Percent of EMR Enrollment		Percent of Each Group in EMR classes	
		68-69	76-77	68-69	76-77
White	72%	43 %	---	0.8%	0.4%
Black	10%	25.5%	25.4%	3.2%	1.1%
Hispanic	15%	29 %	---	2.6%	

[1]Based upon estimates derived from data reported in Larry P. (1979), Yoshida et al. (1976), and personal communication with the California State Department of Education in 1979.

Table 2

[1]Riverside, California, about 1965

	White	Black	Hispanic
Percent of Total Enrollment	82%	9.5%	7%
Percent of MMR Program	53%	32 %	12%
Percent of Group in MMR	0.6%	3.4%	1.7%

[1]Based on data reported by Mercer (1973) and personal communication from Mercer in 1979 indicating that the total enrollment in the Riverside Public Schools in the mid-1960's was about 25,000 students, of which about 1% were in special classes for the mildly retarded.

Table 3

[1]Overrepresentation Data for State of New Jersey

	White	Black	Hispanic
Percent of Total Enrollment	73	18	7
Percent of Total Handicapped Enrollment	71	21	7
Percent of MMR Enrollment	43	43	13
Percent of Group in MMR	0.5	1.9	1.4
Percent of Group in Ed	0.8	2.3	0.7
Percent of Group in LD	2.8	2.3	1.4
Percent of Group in LD + Ed + MMR	4.1	6.5	3.5
Percent of Group in Special Education	10.4	12.5	10.1

[1]Based on data from Manni, et. al., 1980, Table 1, p. 10.

Table 4

[1]Overrepresentation Data For Chicago Public Schools

	1980-81		1983-84	
	White	Black	White	Black
Percent of Total Enrollment	18.7	60.7	15.6	60.6
Percent of Group in MMR	1.7	3.8	1.3	2.9
Percent of Group in LD	4.2	2.4	4.8	3.1
Percent of Group in LD + MMR	5.9	6.2	6.1	6.1
Percent of group in Special Educatiion	11.0	9.7	11.4	10.4

[1]Based on Caught in the Web (1982) and Personal Communication with Chicago Public Schools.

Table 5

[1]National Projections From 1978

OCR Survey (Finn, 1982)

Group	Minority %	White %	Hispanic %	Black %
Classification				
Mildly Mentally Retarded	2.54	1.07	0.98	3.46
Seriously Emotionally Disturbed	0.42	0.29	0.29	0.50
Learning Disabled	2.29	2.32	2.58	2.23
Speech Impaired	1.82	2.04	1.78	1.87
Totally (Mildly Handicapped)	7.07	5.72	5.63	8.06

[1]Based on Finn (1982) Table 1 on p. 324 and Table 3 on p. 330.

Table 6

[1]Mental Retardation and Learning Disability Child Count Data, 1976-1983

	1976-77	1983-84	Change	Per Cent
MR	969,547	650,534	-319,013	-33%
LD	797,213	1,811,489	+1,014,276	+127%

[1]Based on December 1 child counts in the 1976-77 and 1983-84 school years (United States Department of Education, 1985).